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RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0836
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4382
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7927
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5488
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1335
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1276
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 000038

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM BM

SUBJECT: BURMA: KEY ETHNIC CEASE-FIRE GROUP TALKS

REF: A. 06 RANGOON 1129

1B. 06 RANGOON 1119

1C. 06 RANGOON 875

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Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

11. (C) Summary: Top KIO officials told us they were pleased with Aung San Suu Kyi's recent statement, and confirmed that the hard-line Culture Minister had visited them in an effort to convince the KIO to condemn it. The KIO views its relationship with the NLD as a friendship rather than an alliance, and emphasized it has goals beyond the NLD's, such as preserving their ethnic culture and language. They criticized the NLD's inaction and recommended the party become more active, flexible, and willing to engage with the regime. KIO officials explained that their organization supports the roadmap because they see it as the only way of moving forward currently available, but also believe each step must be implemented fairly. End summary.

12. (C) During a recent trip to Myitkyina, pol/econ chief met with Dr. Tu Jar and Dr. La Jar, brothers who are Vice Chairman and General Secretary of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO). The KIO is the political wing of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), a key ethnic cease-fire group whose representatives participated in the National Convention. Tu Jar and La Jar are both medical doctors who left their professions to join the KIA's armed insurgency against the Burma Army. Both came off as articulate and impressive spokesmen for the KIO, who spoke frankly about the KIO's views of the regime's roadmap process, the NLD, and Aung San Suu Kyi's recent statement.

What the Minister of Culture Said

13. (C) Asked about the KIO's view of the recent statement Aung San Suu Kyi released through UN Special Envoy Gambari, La Jar replied that though the KIO had chosen not to respond, they liked the statement very much and appreciated her singling out the importance of the interests and opinions of

the ethnic nationality races. Tu Jar confirmed that hard-line Minister of Culture Khin Aung Myint visited the KIO leadership after the statement was released and asked them to publicly condemn it. (Note: Khin Aung Myint is reportedly close to Than Shwe and participated in the June 2004 Beijing talks between the regime and the U.S., end note.) Tu Jar said Khin Aung Myint explained the regime irritation with the statement on the grounds that they had not been warned in advance of its release, and because it had been released from outside of Burma. In addition, the Minister claimed ASSK was using a trick to open the regime's dialogue with ASSK to the ethnic nationalities and organize them to be on her side. Only the military government could ask others to join the dialogue, the Minister asserted. Tu Jar continued that Khin Aung Myint insisted to them that the KIO was already firmly on the regime's side because it had participated in its National Convention. When the KIO's offices were raided and its cell phones confiscated shortly after Khin Aung Myint departed Myitkyina, they assumed it was in retaliation for not agreeing to denounce ASSK's statement (ref B).

¶4. (C) The KIO elaborated that the cease-fire groups have their own position, apart from both the regime and the NLD: they will support the GOB if they guarantee the Kachin ethnic group certain rights, but they do not oppose the pro-democracy opposition either. Tu Jar told us that if the opposition came into power and offered to give them the protections and benefits they have requested from the regime they would cooperate with them also. Tu Jar emphasized that the ethnic nationalities share the common goal of democracy with the Burman-dominated NLD, but they have additional concerns beyond the NLD's objectives concerning autonomy, national language, and preserving ethnic culture.

¶5. (C) Regarding the peaceful demonstrations in September, Tu Jar stated that the KIO supported the monks and those who

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marched with them, but did not participate in the demonstrations. He strongly condemned the regime's violent crackdown.

Relationship with the NLD

¶6. (C) Tu Jar and La Jar told us the KIO viewed its relationship with the NLD as a "friendship" rather than an "alliance." Tu Jar explained that the difference between the ethnic nationalities and the NLD was that ASSK and her party want total regime change and see the current situation in "black and white" terms. The ethnic nationalities not only suffer from lack of freedom and democracy, but also face an eradication of their national cultures. Because of this, they see a more urgent need to solve the political crisis. Accordingly, the KIO chose to participate in the regime's seven step roadmap to bring about step-by-step progress, rather than wait indefinitely, Tu Jar added. He believed that the regime and the NLD were equally stubborn: the regime tightly focused on its roadmap, refusing to alter the process, while the NLD held equally tightly to the results of the 1990 elections, which it continues to demand the regime honor. Without compromise and flexibility from both sides, Burma's political and economic problems will never be solved, Tu Jar concluded.

¶7. (C) Tu Jar and La Jar also criticized the NLD's inaction and recommended that if ASSK wanted to stand as a symbol of the regime's repression this was fine, but in the meantime, her party should actively work for change in Burma, take a more flexible stance, and be willing to negotiate with the regime.

On the Roadmap

¶8. (C) Asked about their views on the next steps of the regime's roadmap process, Tu Jar and La Jar explained that the KIO formally supported the roadmap because they saw it as the only practical way of moving forward currently. They also insisted each step must be implemented as fairly as possible. The KIO had a wait-and-see approach in terms of the constitution, La Jar continued. While the KIO and other cease-fire groups demanded full autonomy and democracy, the regime only offered partial fulfillment of these demands. For that reason, the KIO had submitted their "19 points" at the national convention (ref C), and the KIO would withhold judgment on the constitution until after it examined the final draft. The KIO would wait to see how many of the 19 points were included in the final draft of the constitution before deciding whether to support it in a national referendum. A redline for the KIO was disarmament, Tu Jar asserted. Not only the KIO, but all cease-fire groups would never accept unconditional disarmament. This is not what had been agreed upon with ousted PM Khin Nyunt, who brokered the cease-fires. The KIO expected an outcome that incorporated give-and-take which left the ethnic nationalities' dignity intact, he explained. Tu Jar and La Jar acknowledged the regime was not currently pushing the disarmament issue with the cease-fire groups. The regime had given tacit permission for them to keep their weapons as long as the insurgent armies were peaceful.

¶9. (C) Another reason the KIO supported the roadmap, Tu Jar explained, was their desire to gain control over Kachin State's natural resources. Regime cronies and the regional commander were plundering the State's valuable jade and teak resources. A constitution and legal government would establish laws to more fairly govern the distribution of local jade and teak concessions with tax revenues accruing to the State, Tu Jar hoped. Tu Jar continued that a new constitution and legislature would at least increase discussion and negotiation between the central government, which would give the States more influence and control.

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China's Role

¶10. (C) Asked if there was any basis for rumors that the PRC had held meetings with Burma's cease-fire groups in China, Tu Jar and La Jar vehemently denied this was true. They related that the KIO had heard the same rumor and immediately approached the Wa, Kokang, and Shan cease-fire groups, who also denied any such meeting took place. Tu Jar claimed that the Chinese want change in Burma, but are afraid of any instability that would threaten business and commercial interests here. Most of all, Tu Jar added, they do not want to see war on their Southern border. In order to ensure this, Tu Jar said the Chinese had encouraged the regime to meet some of the cease-fire groups' demands and to deal peacefully with them.

¶11. (C) Tu Jar concluded by expressing his appreciation for the U.S. role in trying to bring change to Burma, and expressed the KIO's support for Special Envoy Gambari's efforts to initiate a dialogue between the regime and the opposition. He cautioned that great patience and tact was required to deal with the generals.

Comment:

¶12. (C) By participating in the regime's roadmap, the KIO believes it has chosen a more pragmatic and practical route than the NLD to bring political reform to Burma. We agree that both sides need to be more willing to compromise to find a way forward, but the roadmap, in its current form, is

unlikely to bring the stability and rule of the law to Burma.

None of the KIO's 19 points were accepted at the National Convention and there is no reason to believe the regime will incorporate them into the constitution its hand-picked committee is now drafting. Aung San Suu Kyi's statement clearly spooked the regime, which has done little to meet the key demands of the cease-fire groups. The regime's predictable response demonstrated how determined they are to forge ahead a roadmap designed to keep the military in perpetual control. They have no interest in revising the roadmap to incorporate provisions designed to give more rights and protections to the diverse people of Burma, which would bring stability. End comment.

VILLAROSA